

IS ANAESTHESIOLOGY A STRESSFUL SPECIALITY?

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Stress is a non specific adaptive response of our body to any change, pressure or demand imposed on it. It is a homeostatic mechanism for readjustment. Almost all jobs have a potential for stress. Stress levels change during the day, dependent on changing equations between demands, constraints and their individual perception. The stress curve stretches through, Understress, 'healthy stress' and 'overstress'. Each person could experience these stages differently, sometimes in the same day. We perform best when the stress is at the healthy level.

The general feeling amongst anaesthesiologists is, that, the practice of the speciality could be very stressful. Despite the fact, that we are "Eternally Vigilant", mishaps could result from the plethora of drugs used and various anesthetic techniques. Stress does not spare anyone. While the younger amongst us, fresh from the colleges, have greater capacity for absorbing day to day stress, they develop coping strategies which could be counterproductive. Stresses increase as age and responsibilities increase, with the addition of a family and children. Today, every examination the child attends has become an examination for the parent himself! In dual career families, the partner has to bear the stress of not only himself herself but also those which has been

imposed on the other as well. Women in anesthesiologists have problems of their own: they have to manage thin homes in addition to work.

It has been shown that stress is maximum in jobs that involve lots of human interaction. Conflicting demands, unclear expectations and other role stresses increase stress in the work place. We also have the unpleasant task of relating to the stresses of the co-workers too!. Uncontrolled theatre environment, hot stuffy atmosphere, noise, overwork, and the constant fear of contracting transmissible disease are other factors that are regarded as stressful.

Studies on human personality have revealed, that all persons do not react to stress in the same way. Persons who want to achieve more and more in less and less timeframes, the overconfident, so called achievers, are more stress prone. (Type A or CHD personality). As opposed to these, there are others, who are quite, calm, easy going, and non-competitive types (Type B), who are less prone to stress.

The early man was endowed with the ability to react to stress situations instantaneously by fighting back. Centuries of culture, values, beliefs and training has left us with a tendency to suppress our anger, frustrations and